

P 240732Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5021
INFO ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ABIDJAN 000194

DOL FOR TRASA, DGARMS
STATE FOR G/TIP VZEITLIN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EMIN](#) [ECON](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: BETTING ON DUST: A VISIT TO AN ARTISANAL GOLD MINE

11. (U) SUMMARY: Rural villages carry out artisanal gold mining in northwestern Cote d'Ivoire. Yields are minuscule, and mining operations are done by hand. Mines in the north are still primarily under the control of the Forces Nouvelles. Poloff visited the artisanal mining village of Zievasso on March 10, but did not observe any young children working in or near the mines. END SUMMARY

A LOT OF WORK FOR LITTLE PROFIT

12. (U) Poloff paid a visit on March 10 to the artisanal mining village of Zievasso, located 15 km south of Odienne. Tenan Kone, the Regional Director of Mines, had advance notice of the visit, but the village chief and villagers themselves did not. Zievasso is a tiny village with an estimated 100 inhabitants, a small handful of whom were at work during Poloff's visit. Because of the artisanal nature of mining operations in this area, most mines are nothing more than surface holes that have been dug out by hand. On average, most are about 4 to 5 meters deep, though the deepest hole in the Zievasso mine is approximately 12 meters.

Strong young men from the village are responsible for excavating the sand from these surface holes. Afterwards, the excavated sand goes through a several-step process, including being fed through a small, antiquated blasting machine, which turns the sand into fine dust. The dust is then washed with water by hand (usually by village women) to separate the tiny gold flecks from the sand particles.

13. (U) Mori, a local resident of Zievasso who sells gold extracted from the mine, says that buyers pay him 7,500 CFA (approximately \$15 USD) for one gram of gold. He owns one of several parcels of land that are being mined; other villagers own the remaining parcels. Technically, parcel owners are required to pay a 5 percent tax on any profits made from the mine to the national government. However, the government has not collected this tax since the political crisis that began in 2002 with the rebellion of the Forces Nouvelles (FN), which effectively split the country in half. Poloff was accompanied on the visit by the Regional Director of Mines, who said he had not visited Zievasso since 2002. In the absence of government authorities, Forces Nouvelles soldiers (FAFN) have collected taxes on the mine: Mori says he pays somewhere between 80,000 to 100,000 CFA (\$160 to 200 USD) to the FAFN each year, although they did not ask him to pay the tax this past year.

THE MOTHER LODE?

14. (U) Kone, a twenty-year veteran of the Ministry of Mines, said the government believes there are significant gold reserves in Cote d'Ivoire, mainly because there are large gold mines in countries that border Cote d'Ivoire. However, because first president Felix Houphouet-Boigny prioritized agriculture over mining after the country's independence in 1960, land in Cote d'Ivoire has not been fully exploited for mining purposes, Kone said. Therefore, the government has tried to keep the mining tax low - at 5 percent - in order to attract outside investors. Kone said a few exploration permits that have been filed with his office

are currently pending. Foreign investors are welcome to file permits, but only Ivoirians are allowed to engage in artisanal mining. Kone said that, despite this restriction, Guineans and Malians occasionally engage in mining activities due to lack of enforcement of government regulations, and the proximity of many small mines to Guinea and Mali.

THE CHILD LABOR QUESTION

15. (U) Poloff did not observe any young children working in or near the mines in Zievasso. The regional mining director said that children do not have the strength to dig through rock-hard dirt or, in the case of larger mines, operate boring tools and machinery, so they are not generally involved in mining operations. If children are involved, they help with washing dust to separate the gold flakes from the sand. Kone said that village communities do not think it is unusual for children to assist with this work, as it is similar to washing and preparing rice, a common household task children undertake. In Zievasso, Poloff only observed one teenage girl, approximately 14 or 15 years of age, washing sand in order to extract gold flakes. When asked, she explained that she was doing the work in place of her mother, who was sick that day.

16. (U) COMMENT: Although Poloff did not observe young children working in the Zievasso mine, the mine is a small-scale, local operation and therefore not necessarily representative of common mining practices in Cote d'Ivoire. Post will continue to visit gold mining operations in order to provide further reporting on the sector's labor situation.
END COMMENT

AKUETTEH